

Item No. 9	Classification: Open	Date: November 19 2008	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Adoption Report	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the strong performance of Southwark's Adoption Service.
2. To note that the Adoption Service is preparing for an Ofsted inspection in December 2008.
3. To note the Adoption Service "Statement of Purpose".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Service is located within the children looked after (CLA) Business Unit.
5. Southwark is an approved adoption agency.
6. The adoption team undertakes the following key functions:
 - Supporting two independent agency adoption panels who make recommendations with regard to;
 - the suitability of a child for adoption
 - whether a proposed adopter is suitable to adopt a child and
 - whether the child should be placed for adoption with a particular approved adopter, this is known as the matching process..
 - Recruit and assess appropriate potential adopters for approval by Southwark's adoption panels
 - Deliver post adoption support to adopted children and their new families
 - Manage post adoption contact between adopted children and their birth families as directed by the Courts
 - Provide specialist advice and support to looked after teams who are seeking adoption as a permanent outcome for identified children
 - Deliver overseas adoption advice, assessment and support service
7. A service manager provides overall management responsibility for the fostering and adoption service. The adoption team is staffed by a team manager, 2 practice managers, senior practitioner (post adoption support) and team of social workers.

8. Adoption is one of the most highly regulated areas of childcare practice as an adoption order transfers full parental responsibility (PR) for a child to a new family arrangement including changing of the child's name. The making of a final adoption order by the Courts actually removes parental responsibility from the birth parent although in some circumstances there can post adoption contact between birth parents and the child.
9. The 2002 Adoption Act introduced a new order (arrangement) which would offer Courts considering permanent outcomes for children, an alternative to adoption which would be particularly applicable to slightly older children and members of extended family. This new order is known as a "special guardianship order" (SGO) which has the effect of awarding the new carer parental responsibility but does not go as far as adoption with regards to moving PR from birth family and changing the child's name. Families who are granted special guardianship may also eligible for ongoing support from the local authority and other agencies where appropriate.
10. Adoption performance (adoption and SCO orders granted) are reported to the DCSF on an annual basis as part of the set of performance indicators relating to children in public care. Southwark's adoption performance is then compared with other similar local authorities.
11. The DCSF (Ofsted) also undertake regular independent inspections of Adoption services.

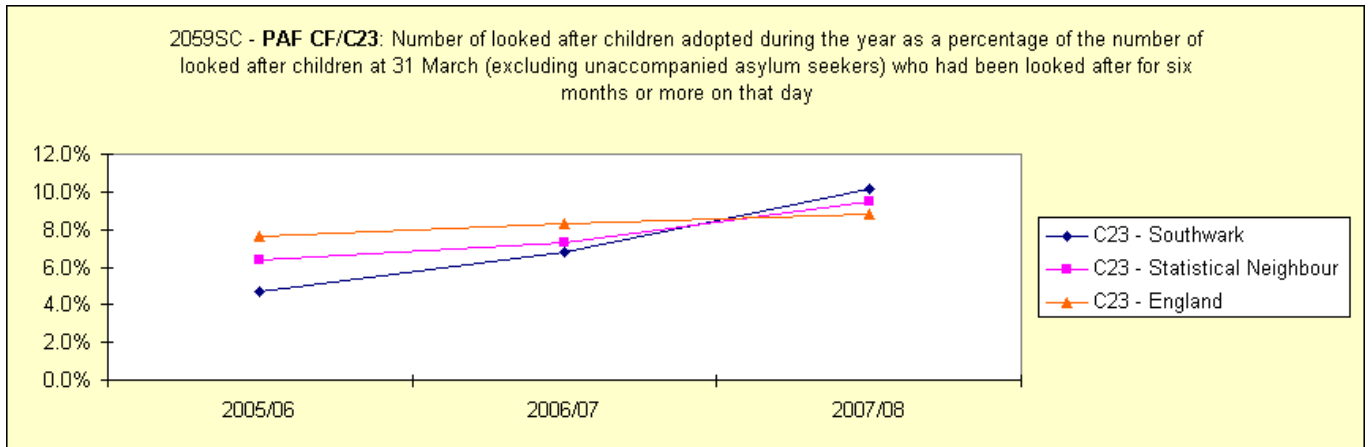
KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Performance

12. All local authorities are measured by recording the percentage of all children within the care system who have been adopted or subject to an SGO during the preceding 12 month period.
13. During 2005/06 Southwark's Adoption performance was only 4.7% which was well below our statistical neighbours.
14. During 2006/07 a review was undertaken and a new strategy developed.
15. This strategy was implemented from January 2007 and has proved effective in improving Southwark's Adoption performance.
16. The chart below shows Southwark's performance over the last few years and includes the projected performance for 08/09.

Bands	Low					High			
	●	●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●	●●	●
2005-08	0<3	3<6	6<7	7<8	8<25	.	.	25<=100	.

	Adoptions (inc SGOs)	Denominator	C23 - Southwark	C23 - Statistical Neighbour	C23 - England
2005/06	23	492	4.7%	6.4%	7.6%
2006/07	32	473	6.8%	7.3%	8.3%
2007/08	44	434	10.1%	9.5%	8.8%
2008/09 so far (Apr-Sep 08)	34	410	8.29%	TBC	TBC



17. The recent JAR inspection (Apr 08) observed that Southwark had significantly improved its Adoption performance and that the CLA service overall was performing to a high standard (“good”).

Strategy to improve Adoption processes

18. As outlined above Southwark introduced a strategy from Jan 07 to improve its Adoption performance.

19. The main components of the strategy were as follows:

- Children’s specialist services established a single business unit for children in care which brought together all the services responsible for delivering Adoption outcomes into a single service.
- Within the CLA Service, three teams were established to work entirely with the 0-12 age group – its main functions to deliver permanent outcomes for children.
- Modifications were made to CareFirst to deliver comprehensive tracking reports for use by the 0-12 service and the Adoption team to track every child where Adoption was being considered as an option.
- Monthly meetings were instigated between 0-12 Team Managers and the Adoption Manager to track every child where Adoption was an option to ensure prompt presentation to panels, early matching with prospective adopters and avoidance of drift at every stage in the process.
- Southwark introduced a monthly integrated Legal Planning Meeting Panel which ensured that Senior Managers from Adoption and the 0-12 service were present at every case discussion which was considering initiating family court proceedings. This ensured that adoption was always fully considered from the very beginning and clear advice offered as to whether adoption should be considered and actions required. This process enabled effective concurrent planning to take place so that there would not be a delay should rehabilitation plans to the family fail and adoption prove to be

the only remaining option.

- Southwark would pursue a proactive policy which would seek to approach members of extended family whenever possible to assume care for children.
- Southwark continued to support two separate independent Adoption panels which each meet once a month. This therefore reduces potential delay in matching and approval processes.
- Arrangements were made with Legal services to identify named legal officers with expertise in Adoption who would support the Adoption panels and the Legal Planning Meeting Panel whilst providing ongoing advice to the Adoption team and 0-12 CLA teams.
- Southwark commissioned an external contractor (F.W.A) to deliver Family Group Conferences. A monitoring group (Adoption Task Force) was established, chaired by the Assistant Director, to track implementation of the strategy.

Equality Impact

20. Southwark has a clear policy which seeks to appropriately match children with adopters who can best meet their assessed needs. When making a “match” the independent Adoption panels must take into account each child’s racial, cultural, religious, disability, gender, sexuality and developmental needs. The panel also recognizes that an Adoptive “family” can take many forms and that no generalizations can be drawn as to which family arrangement might provide a better family environment for a named child. Each child and potential match is therefore dealt with on a case by case basis to meet identified need.
21. Since April 08, the Adoption team has been involved in assessing and tracking 101 placements where permanence is being sought with various family arrangements.
22. The chart below breaks down the 101 children via placement type and ethnicity.

Ethnic breakdown	WB	BA	BC	W/BA	W/BC	BO	WO	Ch	As/Ban	Totals
Family Assessment	2	7	3	-	2	4	2		2	22
Kinship	0	0	1	1	1	3	1			7
SGO	3	5	5	0	1	0	1			15
Adoption	15	7	4	1	3	11	1	1	1	44
LTF	2	4	2		1	3	1			13
Totals	22	23	15	2	8	21	6	1	3	101

23. Southwark needs to recruit potential Adopters from a wide range of families to meet identified need. Clearly different sections of the community access a range of media outlets which render large set piece recruitment campaigns as virtually useless. National campaigns help raise general awareness but Southwark has adopted a strategy of continuous and varied profiling and recruitment activity to reach across the whole spectrum of families in Southwark and to keep the issue of Adoption alive in Southwark. Clearly some children are more difficult to place if they are from small ethnic minority groups or have dual heritage or significant disability / learning needs. As I outlined above, each individual case is tracked by the relevant teams and Adoption Team Manager. Specific recruitment activity can be implemented to target individual children where there are issues of

potential delay.

24. There is a new Performance Indicator being introduced by the DCSF from April 2009, which measures time taken from the decision to adopt to the child actually being placed with their adoptive parents.
25. Southwark continues to perform strongly in this particular area which looks at the percentage of children who are placed for Adoption within 12 months of the court decision. As at October 2008, 89.5% of children approved for adoption (17 of 19 children) were placed within the government timescale.
26. The two children who fell outside the 12 month period were as follows.
 - a) A young person who was older and difficult to find a match-they were adopted by their foster carers with whom they had lived for two years.
 - b) A young person who was difficult to match due to their age and ethnicity which required targeted recruitment and use of external purchasing of a pre approved adopter.
27. At any time Southwark will have a number of children awaiting placement for adoption, agreed by the courts. This group are closely tracked by Southwark's adoption team-each having their own allocated adoption social worker responsible for family finding, matching and introduction processes. The age range of this group is laid out in the statement of purpose (appendix one)

Policy implications

28. Southwark agreed a revised kinship policy in Sep 2008, which clearly outlined its response to the introduction of special guardianship and how post order support and allowances will be delivered. This new policy will assist Legal Services and the 0-12 teams deliver clearer information to extended family members for children who are subject to Court proceedings.

Community Impact Statement

29. The Adoption service runs a number of recruitment activities at local events and community venues.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

30. None.

CONSULTATION

31. This is a particularly difficult area of practice as most adoption applications are made during family proceedings where the family are in real disagreement with Southwark's plan to adopt. Adoption applications are invariably referred up to higher courts to be heard before a judge. All parents involved in the process have legal representation and the child is allocated an independent person (Guardian ad litem) and also has their own legal representation. Given the finality of adoption, the courts are extremely thorough concerning its decisions and accordingly consults widely across the professional network and extended family concerning how best to achieve a positive outcome for the children involved.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Legal & Democratic Services

32. The legal implications are set out in the report.

Finance Director

33. There are no financial implications.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Last Adoption inspection report	East Dulwich Road, Adoption and Fostering Unit CLA Services	Susan Sinclair

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix One	Adoption Service "Statement of Purpose"
Appendix Two	Adoption Inspection December 2008 (Powerpoint)

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services and Safeguarding	
Report Author	Chris Saunders, Head of Services for Children in Care.	
Version	Final	
Dated	November 11 2008	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Legal & Democratic Services	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	November 11 2008	